



## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

01 July 2011

### Version of attached file:

Published Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Roberts, Nicholas (2009) 'Subverted claims : Cortzar, Artaud, and the problematics of jazz.', *Modern language review.*, 104 (3). pp. 730-745.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/mhra/mlr/2009/00000104/00000003/art00007>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

### Additional information:

---

### Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

## SUBVERTED CLAIMS: CORTÁZAR, ARTAUD, AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF JAZZ

At the heart of Cortázar's work lies the basic desire to reunify what he views as an essentially divided humankind. The represser and the repressed, the self and the other ('lo otro'), the civilized and the monstrous: different ways of describing the separation running through the Western world which the Argentine author presents in so many of his texts and characters.<sup>1</sup> It is a separation which signals the wrenching of humankind from an envisaged originary, prelapsarian unity. Starkly identifiable as one of the principal accomplices in this continued bifurcation of humanity is language, located firmly on the side of the civilized, repressing self. As the author Morelli in *Rayuela* declares, language 'nos enmascar[a] la realidad, la humanidad',<sup>2</sup> a view which could be seen both in the light of modern notions of language as a device which frames and excludes and which serves to effect a removal from that to which it acts as referent (found in thinkers such as Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida), and, implied within the context of Cortázar's writing as a whole, as an ontoreligious reference to the division in humankind both from its ontological plenitude, as contained in the link between language and the biblical Fall, and within itself, as described in the myth of Babel.<sup>3</sup>

This is the backdrop against which Cortázar's engagement with music needs to be understood: the need for a new form of expression which is not simply language, a dualistic human structure concomitant with a dividing of humankind, but, rather, one which goes hand in hand with a different way of understanding, expressing, and communicating the world and humanity. The aim of the present article is to examine Cortázar's presentation of jazz from this perspective. Much has been written on the author's engagement with jazz music, but to my knowledge no real attempt has been made either systematically to unpick and explain Cortázar's claims for jazz as being just such a vital and 'authentic' form of expression or to submit those claims to critical analysis and questioning.<sup>4</sup> It is a critical lapsus which this study hopes to begin to address.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most notable exposition of this aspect of Cortázar's writing is that found in Steven Boldy, *The Novels of Julio Cortázar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), in particular as summarized on pp. 7–9.

<sup>2</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela* (1963) (Madrid: Cátedra, 2007), Chapter 99, p. 611; further references follow in the text.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), and Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (London: Fontana, 1997; Italian original 1993), pp. 7–10, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> The most thorough and illuminating study of Cortázar's claims for jazz is Hernán Loyola, 'El jazz en Cortázar: la discada del club de la serpiente', *Casa de las Américas*, 194 (1994), 61–74, where Loyola examines Chapters 10–18 of *Rayuela*. Even here, however, there is no attempt to provide a serious critique of those claims.

<sup>5</sup> The analysis presented here forms part of a wider, ongoing study into Cortázar's engagement with music.

Central to this exploration of Cortázar's jazz will be the proposal that there are several key connexities between Cortázar's concept of jazz and Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty, connexities which enable us better to understand both the traits and the problems of the former. Indeed, that there should be distinct resonances of Artaud's work in Cortázar's ideas on jazz is not surprising given that Cortázar's knowledge of and admiration for Artaud are well documented. Perhaps most notably, Cortázar's first work for *Sur* magazine in 1948 was a note entitled 'Muerte de Antonin Artaud',<sup>6</sup> and the French playwright and thinker also featured in several of Cortázar's subsequent interviews and essays.<sup>7</sup> Several critics have drawn attention to the influence of Artaud on Cortázar's surrealist tendencies,<sup>8</sup> and some attempts have been made at studying Cortázar's texts through a more sustained appeal to the ideas found in Artaud's development of the theatre of cruelty.<sup>9</sup> But, while these are both areas of Cortázar's writing where an engagement with Artaud's work is fruitful, the importance of the latter in an examination of Cortázar's writings on and ideas about jazz has not been properly taken into account. And this despite the fact that the central elements highlighted by the critical accounts alluded to (surrealism and performance) are both present in Cortázar's discussions of and attraction to jazz.<sup>10</sup> By addressing this lacuna, I intend both to suggest a new way of understanding the theoretical and literary context in which Cortázar's engagement with jazz is to be placed and to offer a revisionary critical lens through which that engagement might be analysed.

In the early essay 'Soledad de la música'<sup>11</sup> Cortázar sets out the basis of his fascination with music, namely the difference between it and language. Cortázar refers to Paul Valéry's bemoaning of the 'desdichada condición del poeta, obligado a construir su Obra con palabras, elementos impuros y sujetos a los peores malentendidos'. The contrast between this (verbal) expression and its musical counterpart is that 'mientras lo poético en sí guarda sólo una relación de analogía con el vehículo que intenta expresarlo, la música es *una* con su

<sup>6</sup> Julio Cortázar, 'Muerte de Antonin Artaud', *Sur*, 163 (1948), 80–82.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Lucille Kerr and others, 'Interview: Julio Cortázar', *Diacritics*, 4.4 (1974), 35–40, and Julio Cortázar, 'Así se empieza', in *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967), 2 vols (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 1970), I, 7–14.

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps most significant is Evelyn Picon Garfield, *¿Es Julio Cortázar un surrealista?* (Madrid: Gredos, 1975).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. James Troiano, 'Theatrical Technique and the Fantastic in Cortázar's "Instrucciones para John Howell"', *Hispanic Journal*, 6.1 (1984), 111–19.

<sup>10</sup> The link between jazz and surrealism is made explicitly by Cortázar himself: see Omar Prego, *La fascinación de las palabras: conversaciones con Cortázar* (Barcelona: Muchnik 1985), p. 163; also signalled by Garfield, *¿Es Julio Cortázar un surrealista?*, pp. 93–95. Cortázar highlights the performative aspects of jazz in texts such as 'Louis, enormísimo cronopio' and 'La vuelta al piano de Theolonius Monk' (Cortázar, *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos*, II, 13–22, 23–28).

<sup>11</sup> Julio Cortázar, 'Soledad de la música', in *Cartas desconocidas de Julio Cortázar: 1939–1945*, ed. by Mignon Domínguez (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1992), pp. 290–97; further references follow in the text.

expresión sonora' ('Soledad', p. 290). In other words, in music the idea and its vehicle are one, whereas in poetry (words) there is already a distancing between the idea, or the poetic essence, and its expression. Moreover, inasmuch as words are described as 'sujetos a los peores malentendidos', the implication is also that music is not subject to misunderstanding but is, rather, directly experienced by the recipient, who listens 'sin problemas de significación o de conceptos'. In sum, music can, 'al parecer', communicate 'directly' without an intermediary vehicle or mode of communication and attendant problems of production (translation of the Idea) and reception (understanding of the meaning of that vehicle of transmission); as Cortázar puts it, in music 'no se alzan barreras de lenguaje'. This opening, quasi-utopian presentation of music is then countered by Cortázar, however, as he goes on to explain that 'la barrera que distancia del poema al lector —lenguaje— existe bajo otra forma para desgajar la música de su oyente; esa barrera inevitable es la *interpretación*'. This is the essential problematic faced by what we might term interpreted or scored music, usually appearing in Cortázar's work as either tango or classical. Put simply, Cortázar's principal point here is that 'la obra debe ser ejecutada cada vez que se desee participar su contenido': the musical work must be performed or interpreted by a musician capable of 'abri[r] las puertas de la música instrumental', effectively placing the listener at the mercy of an intermediary between him/herself and the work. And, as Cortázar underscores, 'toda comunicación de [una] obra por un ejecutante es ya versión, interpretación, y no la Obra misma' ('Soledad', pp. 292–93).

Yet what Cortázar is describing here is more complex than simply the erection of a single barrier between work and reception, composer and listener. While somewhat eliding the presence of the musical score in this process, the implications of the schema outlined in this essay are nevertheless that the fundamental barrier is double in nature: not only does the interpretative act serve as a barrier which prevents the listener from achieving access to the originary work, but it contains in itself an internal barrier, as the musician is separated from composer and composition by the score, the work's inscription on a system of staves.<sup>12</sup>

The one type of music which escapes the impasse implied by the introduction of the intermediary performer, however, is jazz, as Cortázar proceeds to underline:

Entre ellos [los *jazzmen*] no hay *autores* y *ejecutantes*, músicos e intérpretes. [. . .] No tratan de ejecutar creaciones ajenas; apoyan su orquesta sobre una melodía y un ritmo conocidos, y *crean, libremente, su música*. ('Soledad', p. 294)

<sup>12</sup> Cortázar here seems unwilling to explore the obvious parallels between the writing of the poem in words and the writing of the musical work in notes, despite indications that he is aware of such parallels: 'Su mano deposita en el pentagrama la notación que *significa* la concepción sonora' ('Soledad', p. 292); 'La música no puede ser escrita' (ibid., p. 295).

A similar point is also made in an interview with Ernesto González Bermejo, where Cortázar, here hinting at the important presence of the score alluded to above, and with jazz's improvisational elements in mind, declares that

a diferencia de la música llamada clásica [. . .] donde hay una partitura y un ejecutante que la interpreta con más o menos talento, en el jazz sobre un bosquejo, un tema o algunos acordes fundamentales, cada músico crea su obra, es decir, que no hay un intermediario, no existe la mediación de un intérprete.<sup>13</sup>

Gone, then, is the divide between composer and performer, a work and its representation, ideation and expression. And for Cortázar it is this characteristic of jazz and, specifically, jazz improvisation that constitutes the basis of its role as a form of expression which is essentially different from other musical forms, and, thus, as a form of musical expression identifiable with the author's opening description in 'Soledad' of how music avoids language's problematics. What is more, this bringing together of idea and expression, composition and performance in itself hints at just the breaking down of divides in humankind which Cortázar seeks in his writing.

Significantly, the statements by Cortázar on which I have been focusing are also key in signalling the similarity between his concept of jazz and certain aspects of Antonin Artaud's concept of the theatre of cruelty. In his work *Le Théâtre et son double* (1938)<sup>14</sup> Artaud sets out a lengthy and not wholly coherent set of discussions on and prescriptions for this radically new type of theatre. Among the precepts he describes are that 'nous ne jouerons pas de pièce écrite' (p. 564) and, with regard to the *mise en scène*, that

c'est dans l'utilisation et le maniement de ce langage [la mise-en-scène] que se fondera la vieille dualité entre l'auteur et le metteur en scène, remplacés par une sorte de Créateur unique, à qui incombera la responsabilité double du spectacle et de l'action. (p. 561)

These citations underscore that the key points of a removal of performance as a reading or interpretation of a text and the closing of the divide between composition and performance are common elements to both Artaud's theatre and the ideal elements of jazz for Cortázar.

Beyond these basic shared aims, several other axial elements of Artaud's theatre also find their musical counterpart in Cortázar's thought and texts on jazz, thus further suggesting a more than coincidental parallel between the two. In particular, three highly resonant examples can be identified, each helping to draw attention to the double focus of Cortázar's writing on jazz as a form of expression which is radically different from language and which thus erases

<sup>13</sup> Ernesto González Bermejo, *Revelaciones de un cronopio: conversaciones con Cortázar* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1986; originally published in 1978 as *Conversaciones con Cortázar*), pp. 49–50.

<sup>14</sup> In Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres*, ed. and annotated by Évelyne Grossman (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), pp. 501–93; further references follow in the text.

the divides in Western humankind. Firstly, and leading on from the collapsing of the separation between composer and performer, idea and expression, we have the reconfiguration of the usual divide between performers and audience. Artaud comments that, in the theatre of cruelty, 'nous supprimons la scène et la salle qui sont remplacées par une sorte de lieu unique, sans cloisonnement, ni barrière d'aucune sorte' (p. 563). And this is likewise reflected in Cortázar's approach to musical performance: in the story 'Las ménades' the performer/audience divide in the classical music scenario is spectacularly broken down as the crowd invades the stage and kills and devours the musicians;<sup>15</sup> and in 'Louis, enormísimo cronopio' Cortázar underscores that such a reconfiguration of the performative space is a characteristic of the jazz man/jazz aficionado relationship at jazz concerts: 'Esta noche el teatro está copiosamente invadido por cronopios que no contentos con desbordarse por la sala y trepar hasta las lámparas, invaden el escenario y se tiran por el suelo' ('Louis, enormísimo cronopio', p. 14, emphasis added). On the one hand, this breaking down of the divide between audience and performer, integral to jazz but counter to the characteristics and prevailing sensibilities of classical music as presented in 'Las ménades', reflects the fact that, in contrast to words which are 'sujetos a los peores malentendidos' ('Soledad', p. 290), music does not, apparently, have to be interpreted by its public: that separating gap is closed, as the lack of discursive structure in musical communication allows the Work to be 'directly' reproduced in the listener:

*Decir el Mensaje*: tal la agonía del poeta, porque la Poesía y el Mensaje son *indecibles* y sólo arriban al espíritu por obra de una intuición ajena a todo mecanismo lógico, a toda estructura discursiva . . .

En tanto, el músico sonríe. ('Soledad', p. 292)

Yet, on the other hand, this conflating of stage and stalls also ties in with the claim made for jazz most vigorously in *Rayuela*, namely that it is a music which brings people together, a universal form of expression, and one which thus appears to afford the return to an undivided, originary humanity that Cortázar seeks:

la única música universal del siglo [. . .] que reconcilia mexicanos con noruegos y rusos y españoles, los reincorpora al oscuro fuego central olvidado, torpe y mal y precariamente los devuelve a un origen traicionado. (*Rayuela*, p. 204 (17))

In effect, then, what is at stake in Cortázar's presentation of jazz is, similarly to Artaud's statements on the theatre of cruelty, a systematic dismantling of each of the apparent divides found within both linguistic expression and musical composition and performance. And what is entailed in this bringing together

<sup>15</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Los relatos 1. Ritos* (Madrid: Alianza, 1994; story originally published in 1956 in *Final del juego*), pp. 186–99.

of the three strata of composer, performer, and audience is precisely the sort of *ontological* unity found in the above statement in *Rayuela*.

Beyond this conflating of apparently binary divides, the second element linking Artaud's theatre and Cortázar's jazz is found in the idea of risk or danger, of standing against a safe and conventional approach to each respective artistic genre. For Artaud, the rejection of such an approach is key to his theatre of cruelty. The first manifesto details a call to eschew Western theatrical conventions on every level, from language used to musical instruments employed, from costume to props, and it is a rejection based, significantly, on his conception of contemporary theatre as being 'en décadence [. . .] parce qu'il a rompu [. . .] avec le Danger' (Artaud, p. 528). A (re)insertion of just such a sense of danger pervades much of his description of the envisaged theatre of cruelty:

Or ce qui me paraît devoir le mieux réaliser à la scène cette idée de danger est l'imprévu non dans les situations mais dans les choses, le passage intempestif, brusque, d'une image pensée à une image vraie [. . .]. Tout ce qui agit es une cruauté. C'est sur cette idée d'action poussée à bout, et extrême que le théâtre doit se renouveler. [. . .] Tout ce qui est dans l'amour, dans le crime, dans la guerre, ou dans la folie, il faut que le théâtre nous le rende, s'il veut retrouver sa nécessité. (Artaud, pp. 529, 555, 556)

Moving to Cortázar, jazz and jazz musicians are often described in similar terms. Oliveira, for example, describes 'los juegos de Dizzy Gillespie sin red en el trapezio más alto' (*Rayuela*, p. 177 (12)), and saxophonist Charlie Parker, the basis for the character Johnny Carter in 'El perseguidor',<sup>16</sup> was one of the leading proponents of bebop, a form of jazz which was predicated on breaking away from conventional jazz moulds and taking melodic and rhythmic risks.<sup>17</sup>

What is central here is that such an approach to music is also seen to lead to a sense of threat, not just in terms of musical conventions and expression, but, more widely, to the securities and being of both musician and listener. This is particularly evident in Bruno's reaction to Johnny in 'El perseguidor'. At one point, for instance, he declares that 'nunca me preocupo demasiado por las cosas que dice Johnny, pero ahora, con su manera de mirarme, he sentido frío' ('El perseguidor', p. 230), and Johnny's death is itself greeted with a sense of relief that there is no longer the threat that he might speak out critically against Bruno's biography. Indeed, Cortázar is not the only one to see such a threat in experimental jazz music and its proponents. John Litweiler, for example, describes the jazz composer Bob Graettinger's music as 'a threat to our very sanity',<sup>18</sup> a statement which recalls Johnny's apparent loss of (conven-

<sup>16</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Los relatos 3. Pasajes* (Madrid: Alianza, 1994; story originally published in 1959 in *Las armas secretas*), pp. 220–74.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 202–04; James Lincoln Collier, *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 350–55.

<sup>18</sup> John Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle: Jazz after 1958* (1984) (Poole: Blandford, 1985), p. 18.

tional) sanity and his envisaged effect on others: 'a Johnny no se le puede seguir así la corriente porque vamos a acabar todos locos' ('El perseguidor', p. 250). Furthermore, the fear thus provoked by these jazzmen in the threat they are perceived as representing is referred to several times by Cortázar. Bruno at one point admits that 'a lo mejor le tengo un poco de miedo a Johnny' ('El perseguidor', p. 232), and in 'Clifford' we are told of the trumpeter Clifford Brown's music being 'como un aletazo que desgarrá lo continuo',<sup>19</sup> which resonates with Marcos's reference in *Libro de Manuel* to 'los órdenes estatuidos, manera elegante de esconder el miedo al gran aletazo'.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, the conjunction of these two quotations discloses that the breaking of conventional musical moulds and the willingness to create music which is dangerous and a threat are tied up with a more general threat to the conventions of human society and being. Indeed, this is also what is found in Artaud's theatre of cruelty. Here too examples of the envisaged injection of danger into the theatre are bound up with the instilling of general fear and unsettlement:

Un autre exemple serait l'apparition d'un Être inventé, fait de bois et d'étoffe, créé de toutes pièces, ne répondant à rien, et cependant inquiétant par nature, capable de réintroduire sur la scène un petit souffle de cette grande peur métaphysique. (Artaud, p. 529)

What is at stake here is foregrounded in Artaud's preface, where he declares that

ceci amène à rejeter les limitations habituelles de l'homme et des pouvoirs de l'homme, et à rendre infinies les frontières de ce qu'on appelle la réalité.

Il faut croire à un sens de la vie renouvelé par le théâtre. (Artaud, p. 509)

The parallel with Cortázar's own notion of a return to an originary humankind beyond its current discursive, societal, and binary structures is marked, and underscores the similarity of both goal and way in which such a goal can potentially be achieved as the two authors go about describing the art form in question.

Within the concern for creating an artistic form which moves away from conventional generic characteristics there is one specific trait of both Artaud's theatre and Cortázar's jazz which is particularly fundamental in the potential realization of this common goal of changing human ontology and society, and one which corresponds to Cortázar's overarching interest in a form of communication which escapes the strictures and structures of linguistic expression. The third example of a rapprochement between Cortázar and Artaud's work, then, is in their approach to language.

In the preface to *Le Théâtre et son double* Artaud sums up the importance of

<sup>19</sup> Julio Cortázar, *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos*, I, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Libro de Manuel* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1973), p. 254.



his envisaged approach to language, where he aims to 'briser le langage pour toucher la vie' (Artaud, p. 509). Following the first manifesto he clarifies his concept of the theatre of cruelty in correspondence drawing attention to this linguistic aspect and expanding the initial declaration of intent:

Ce mot de cruauté doit être pris dans un sens large, et non dans le sens matériel et rapace qui lui est prêté habituellement. Et je revendique, ce faisant, le droit de briser avec le sens usuel du langage, de rompre une bonne fois l'armature, de faire sauter le carcan, d'en revenir aux origines étymologiques de la langue. (Artaud, p. 566)

The similarities between these statements and Cortázar's general aims and specific claims for jazz, referred to above, are striking; such a breaking of expressional norms and structures is precisely what Morelli calls for in *Rayuela*, as Etienne notes:

el escritor tiene que incendiar el lenguaje, acabar con las formas coaguladas e ir todavía más allá, poner en duda la posibilidad de que este lenguaje esté todavía en contacto con lo que pretende mentar. No ya las palabras en sí, porque eso importa menos, sino la estructura total de una lengua, de un discurso. [. . .] Lo que él quiere es transgredir el hecho literario total, el libro, si querés. (*Rayuela*, p. 620 (99))

And it is, for Cortázar, just such a continual playing with and shaking up of (its) language that jazz improvisation works to effect. Indeed, the association of jazz with the manipulation and transformation of its language, and hence with language *tout court*, is stark at times, not least where we read that 'el jazz es como un pájaro que migra o emigra o inmigra o transmigra' (*Rayuela*, p. 204 (17)).

Fundamental to this association is the idea that the improvisational qualities of jazz enable it to escape from the internal structures of language; that is, from discursive logic and thought. In an interview with González Bermejo, Cortázar draws attention to jazz as being based completely on inspiration, 'una creación que no está sometida a un discurso lógico y preestablecido sino que nace de las profundidades'. Jazz is thus capable, for Cortázar, not of communicating information 'de tipo inteligible o de tipo discursivo', but, instead, of communicating 'otras cosas que ningún lenguaje, ninguna escritura pueden comunicar. Y se refiere a sentidos [. . .] a la comunicación de ciertas dimensiones de la realidad.'<sup>21</sup> This helps us understand why what separates Johnny Carter, the saxophonist in 'El perseguidor', from the rest of humanity 'no tiene ninguna explicación' ('El perseguidor', p. 250), as well as indicating the link between this particular trait of jazz and the central claim made by Cortázar in his fiction, interviews, and essays, namely that jazz, and jazz improvisation in particular, can smash through the linguistic and civilized façade we live behind, the 'explosión de la música' which Cortázar describes as the moment when

<sup>21</sup> González Bermejo, *Revelaciones*, pp. 80–81.

'la costra de la costumbre se rajó en millones de pedazos' ('El perseguidor', pp. 234–35), the *costra* being the conventions of society, the mask of language covering humankind and the world, and the dividing barriers erected by it. One could even use Artaud's statement as an accurate summary of what Cortázar is describing here: 'briser le langage pour toucher la vie' (Artaud, p. 509).

The parallels between Artaud's theatre of cruelty and Cortázar's concept of jazz pointed to here are significant because of the clear awareness and appreciation that Cortázar had for Artaud's work. They indicate, at the very least, a possible influence behind Cortázar's formulation and development of his ideas in this regard. That is not to say that Cortázar's presentation of jazz and language can simply be mapped onto or is entirely consistent with Artaud's concept of the theatre—far from it—yet it would be possible, and potentially fruitful, to identify the many more connexities between the two authors in this area and thus extend the insights and theoretical contextualization offered by an appreciation of their artistic and philosophical nexus. However, the parallels highlighted are also significant in that they suggest the potential for readings of Artaud's work to be turned onto Cortázar's writings on jazz, in the process helping to reveal the presence of several problematical factors in the latter which are often glossed over in critical work on Cortázar. And it is towards this element of the connection between Artaud and Cortázar that I should like now to turn, looking specifically at how we can make use of Derrida's treatment of Artaud in the essay 'Le Théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation'.<sup>22</sup>

As Dominic Moran's work has shown,<sup>23</sup> Derrida offers a highly pertinent and useful lens through which to examine Cortázar's texts, and his analysis of Artaud's theatre of cruelty is, accordingly, highly revealing as an elucidation both of what is going on in Cortázar's treatment of jazz and, concomitantly, of the ways in which Cortázar's own texts undermine the ultimate claims made in them for jazz. Writing on Artaud, Derrida correctly points out that what is at stake is the idea of an end to representation and repetition, declaring that '*Artaud a voulu effacer la répétition en general*',<sup>24</sup> and he refers specifically to Artaud's statement that

ce qui a été dit n'est plus à dire; qu'une expression ne vaut pas deux fois, ne vit pas deux fois; que toute parole prononcée est morte et n'agit qu'au moment où elle est prononcée, qu'une forme employée ne sert plus et n'invite qu'à en rechercher une autre, et que le théâtre est le seul endroit au monde où un geste fait ne se recommence pas deux fois. (Artaud, p. 550)

For Derrida, this signals that

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 341–68.

<sup>23</sup> Dominic Moran, *Questions of the Liminal in the Fiction of Julio Cortázar* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Derrida, 'Le Théâtre de la cruauté', p. 361.

la 'grammaire' du théâtre de la cruauté [. . .] restera toujours l'inaccessible limite d'une représentation qui ne soit pas répétition, d'une *re-présentation* qui soit présence pleine, qui ne porte pas en soi son double comme sa mort, d'un présent qui ne répète pas, c'est à dire d'un présent hors du temps, d'un non-présent.<sup>25</sup>

Within this analysis all the usual Derridean suspects are there: a locus or 'centre' which is both within the system of structure and yet beyond it, the reaching for a beyond of representation and iterability, and the attendant achievement of full presence (both temporally and ontologically speaking) which does not contain within it a marker of its own absence. What is more, now that we are alerted to the idea that this is what is at stake in Artaud's theatre, it becomes clear that these same concerns are found within Cortázar's presentation of jazz. As we have seen in the earlier quotation from *Rayuela*, jazz is described as effecting a return to the 'oscuro fuego central olvidado' (*Rayuela*, p. 204 (17)), a centre described earlier on in the novel in terms which resonate starkly with Derridean concepts and terminology: 'una zona inimaginable que hubiera sido inútil pensar porque todo pensamiento lo destruía apenas procuraba cercarlo [. . .] un centro, si era un centro [. . .] excentrarlo hacia un centro sin embargo inconcebible' (*Rayuela*, p. 180 (12)).<sup>26</sup> And it is similarly with respect to this notion of an ontological centre that we can understand the focus on the attainment of pure presence and a pure present, found not just in Artaud's theatre, as Derrida notes, but also in Cortázar's jazz. This is made explicit in 'El perseguidor' in particular, where Johnny's jazz works to effect a move from linear, or what emerges as 'inauthentic', time towards a timelessness identifiable with an originary human essence or identity. Thus, at one point Johnny states that 'la música me sacaba del tiempo, aunque no es más que una manera de decirlo. Si quieres saber lo que realmente siento, yo creo que la música me metía en el tiempo' ('El perseguidor', p. 225).

What is most crucial, however, is the realization that the key to these goals of Cortázar's jazz lies in the explicit reference which Cortázar makes to jazz solos as being 'de pura improvisación que [los jazzmen] no repiten nunca': they are unrepeatable or, in Derridean terms, non-iterable.<sup>27</sup> In short, just as Derrida identified this fundamental aim of Artaud's theatre, so too can we see that this characteristic of jazz is central to Cortázar's presentation of it. Importantly, Derrida argues that iterability is the condition of language *tout court*:

Cette itérabilité [. . .] structure la marque d'écriture elle-même, quel que soit d'ailleurs

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>26</sup> This description is echoed in Derrida's essay 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines' (Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 409–28), where he talks of how 'le centre peut être dit, paradoxalement, *dans* la structure et *hors* de la structure. Il est au centre de la totalité et pourtant, puisque le centre ne lui appartient pas, la totalité *a son centre ailleurs*. Le centre n'est pas le centre' (p. 410).

<sup>27</sup> Prego, *La fascinación de las palabras*, p. 163.

le type d'écriture. [. . .] La possibilité de répéter et donc d'identifier les marques est impliqué [*sic*] dans tout code, fait de celui-ci une grille communicable, transmissible, déchiffrable, itérable pour un tiers, puis pour tout usager possible en général.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, it is precisely in being non-iterable that jazz improvisation can claim to be beyond the structures of language, beyond the play of *différance*, and, hence, make possible the sort of ontological and expressional leap with which Cortázar is concerned.

Yet this insight into Cortázar's presentation of jazz offered by a consideration of Derrida's writing both on Artaud and beyond also carries with it the disclosure of a series of problems related to the very possibility of the attainment of such a non-iterable form of (musical) expression. Put simply, in understanding both Artaud's and Cortázar's aims in the way outlined above, both projects are seen to be beset by the fundamental problematic which so much of Derrida's work addresses, namely that any such linguistic or musical expression, outside of time and beyond representation, is a necessary impossibility, since as soon as it is uttered, it is always already inscribed within representation. And it is this problematic that weaves its way through Cortázar's writing and comments on jazz, resulting in the persistent undermining of their surface claims.

One of the most significant areas in which this pulling back from the (im)possibility of ontological and expressional plenitude is evident is the two principal scenarios whereby jazz music is produced by the musician and received by the listener in Cortázar's writing: the concert and the record.

As is evidenced in 'Las ménades', the classical concert scenario is one which points up binary or, at least, dialectical divides with its separation between orchestra and audience. This underscores how scored and interpreted music inscribes humankind into a dualistic reality and, thus, works to repeat the essential divisions effected by language in Cortázar's thought. As mentioned earlier, such a divide is apparently collapsed in the presentation of the jazz concert in 'Louis, enormísimo cronopio', where the audience climb onto the stage and generally ignore the rules of etiquette and decorum.<sup>29</sup> But a closer look at what is at stake in this piece reveals a profound reinscription within exactly the dialectical terms from which Cortázar is suggesting an escape. For one, the term Cortázar uses here to describe this jazz audience which participates actively in the performance in its irruption onto the stage, *cronopios*, is set up in contrast to the term *famas*, used to describe a more conventional audience: 'los famas llegados al concierto por error o porque había que ir o

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972), pp. 367–93 (p. 375).

<sup>29</sup> The difference between the actions of the audience here and those of the public at the concert in 'Las ménades' is that in the latter such actions are presented as running contrary to the nature of the classical concert, whereas in 'Louis, enormísimo cronopio' they are an essential, fitting part of the jazz concert.

porque cuesta caro, se miran entre ellos con un aire estudiadamente amable, pero naturalmente no han entendido nada, les duele la cabeza de manera horrorosa' ('Louis, enormísimo cronopio', p. 20). Several elements jump out at the reader here. Firstly, Cortázar's attempt at signalling how a jazz audience differs from a conventional, or classical, one in fact acts to assert a new binary divide. Second, the terms of that binary divide, where the *cronopios* are capable of 'correctly' understanding what they are hearing, in contrast to the *famas* who 'no han entendido nada', immediately undercuts the assertion that jazz music—and music *per se*—is not exactly like words in being 'sujetos a los peores malentendidos' ('Soledad', p. 290). Thirdly, Cortázar effectively repeats just the sort of repression and exclusion on the part of civilized humanity which his writing criticizes so heavily, as the divide between represser and repressed is reconfigured in the jazz concert as that between the blessed and the unworthy with the final reference to 'Louis cronopio, Louis enormísimo cronopio, Louis alegría de los hombres que te merecen' ('Louis, enormísimo cronopio', p. 22).

In short, rather than breaking down the divides in humankind and human communication and constituting 'la única música universal del siglo' (*Rayuela*, p. 204 (17)), the portrayal of jazz as played and experienced in concert denies these goals, with even the apparent collapsing of the audience/performer divide being undermined by the self-correcting addition of the superlative *enormísimo* both in the above quotation and in the piece's title. Just as Artaud's theatre is caught 'dans la dialectique' in being bound up in and as representation, that is, so too does Cortázar find it impossible to talk of jazz performance in a way which removes it from the dialectical terms which he himself uses to describe and define the logic and mechanisms of language in works such as 'Soledad de la música' and *Rayuela*.

Moving to the record, the second method of production and reception of jazz to which Cortázar refers, the extent to which the structures and strictures of language are left in place is even more striking. In interview with Omar Prego, Cortázar lauds the importance of records in ensuring that the transcendental moments of jazz which 'no necesit[an] una partitura' are not lost, affirming that 'si eso no se graba la improvisación muere en el mismo minuto en que termina'. But, of course, this would seem to be the point given our reading of Derrida's analysis of Artaud and of Cortázar's own words in this same interview, implying that the value of jazz improvisation lies in the fact that 'no [se] repit[e] nunca'.<sup>30</sup> Yet this is exactly what happens when it is recorded and listened to again and again: it is rendered infinitely repeatable or iterable. Indeed, Johnny, in 'El perseguidor', can be read as emphasizing this point. He vehemently opposes the existence of the recording of his performance of 'Amorous' and demands that the record be destroyed. In Bruno's narration this

<sup>30</sup> Prego, *La fascinación de las palabras*, pp. 163–64.

appears to be because Johnny considered the piece to be of poor quality: 'lo primero que dijo Johnny fue que todo había salido como el diablo, y que esa grabación no contaba para nada' ('El perseguidor', p. 244). Yet, I would suggest, this rejection of the recording can be understood as coming about because the improvisation was a glimpse of a beyond of language which is now gone and whose repetition would be an immediate negation or loss of that glimpse, since it would constitute its inscription within a system of *différance*, of repeated representation.

Ultimately, the point here is that the act of recording is an act of writing down. The record and its grooves are the classical score, or the words on a piece of paper, there to be read and turned into sound by the stylus, just as the musicians read and produce the sounds of the notes on the stave, as the perceived advantage of having eschewed the score is negated by this move. The irony lies, then, in the fact that Cortázar promotes a way of listening to jazz which is reliant upon and inscribed within an essentially linguistic process of production and reception. Moreover, it is an irony also found in Artaud's work, where, despite his insistence on discarding a (written) text on which the play relies—'on doit en finir avec cette superstition des textes' (Artaud, p. 551)—he ends up by insisting on its being codified: '*le spectacle sera chiffré d'un bout à l'autre, comme un langage*' (Artaud, p. 564, underline added).

What is significant here is that the problematics of Cortázar's jazz—and Artaud's theatre—are shown to be inextricably linked not just to the impossibility of escaping iterability and representation, but also to a determined move back towards linguistic processes and structures on the part of both writers. In Cortázar's case, this move is not limited to the methods of production and reception of jazz, but comes to characterize the musical stance of both Cortázar and several of the jazz figures to whom he refers. With regard to Cortázar himself, on the one hand he frequently made clear his love of Charlie Parker, both explicitly in interviews<sup>31</sup> and implicitly in the homage paid to him in 'El perseguidor'. Moreover, part of what marked Parker out was the need for a constant looking forward, away from a repetition of what had already been done, as Cortázar highlights in his description of Johnny Carter as a musician for whom 'el deseo le exige avanzar, buscar, negando por adelantado los encuentros fáciles del jazz tradicional' ('El perseguidor', p. 242). Yet, on the other hand, Cortázar's jazz tastes largely revolved around a nostalgic past, guided not by a desire to advance and seek anew but by the need for a reassuring security and link with the past. This is made clear in interview with Prego, where he compares his jazz preferences with tango, one of the examples of scored music to which he refers elsewhere:

<sup>31</sup> See Antonio Trilla, 'Cortázar: el boxeo y el jazz, dos pasiones de cronopios' (1983) <[http://www.geocities.com/juliocortazar\\_arg/jazzbox.htm](http://www.geocities.com/juliocortazar_arg/jazzbox.htm)> [accessed 19 January 2009], and González Bermejo, *Revelaciones*, p. 80.

el viejo jazz de New Orleans y el llamado jazz de Chicago en el fondo es mi jazz, y cuando llega la hora y tengo ganas de escuchar jazz, de tres veces dos saco a Duke Ellington, Armstrong, saco los viejos cantantes de blues. Con el tango es igual, soy muy pasatista en materia de música porque ese tipo de música está muy ligado a tu vida personal, es imposible separar una serie de nostalgias y vivencias de otro tiempo.<sup>32</sup>

A similar pulling back from the sort of jazz seen to offer the ontological and expressional possibilities in question is also evident in the depiction of some of the most prominent jazz musicians to appear in Cortázar's writing. In *Rayuela*, for example, the 'Club de la Serpiente' notes that, after his 'gran época', Louis Armstrong lost his edge and 'lo que sigue es costumbre y papel carbónico [. . .] pura rutina' (*Rayuela*, pp. 182–83 (13)), the references to habit, routine, and carbon paper emphasising the move back into repetition and copying—precisely what both Cortázar and Artaud are trying to avoid. Similarly, another of the jazzmen Cortázar refers to, Thelonious Monk, has also been described as 'turn[ing] gradually away toward a warmer, more nostalgic music'.<sup>33</sup>

In short, both for author and jazz musicians there is a sense that the threat posed by the jazz of which Cortázar writes, the threat, that is, to everything we are accustomed to as reality and to our expression and being in and as language, proves unembraceable. It is, ultimately, shied away from as these figures fall back into the reassuring security of what they already know.

And yet, these problems in many ways remain secondary to the fundamental issues raised by our consideration of Derrida's writing. As Derrida says of Artaud, 'la présence, pour être présence et présence à soi, a toujours déjà commencé à se représenter, a toujours été entamée. L'affirmation elle-même doit s'entamer en se répétant'; a theatre of cruelty 'commence par sa propre représentation'.<sup>34</sup> That is, upon making itself present, any jazz improvisation is, likewise, always already inscribed in and as representation and repetition, marked as iterable and caught within an essentially linguistic structure of, to use the Derridean term once more, *différance*. And this is what emerges insistently from a closer look at both Cortázar's texts and the nature of jazz itself. It is notable, for instance, that, as mentioned above, one of the aspects of jazz music and jazz improvisation that is highlighted in 'El perseguidor' is its need constantly to 'avanzar, buscar' ('El perseguidor', p. 242). It constantly changes, renovates its own lexicon and grammar, both in terms of the generation of new jazz genres and in its improvisations. But part of the reason behind this is precisely the inevitability with which whatever is played is instantly inscribed into a referential and differential system: it may renew its lexicon, but it is still a lexical and grammatical structure, where, for one, what is new only has meaning in relation to what already is. This characteristic of jazz—and any musical genre—

<sup>32</sup> Prego, *La fascinación de las palabras*, p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle*, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Derrida, 'Le Théâtre de la cruauté', pp. 366–67.

is hinted at in references made by Cortázar himself to how jazz musicians ‘apoyan su orquesta sobre una melodía y un ritmo conocidos’, and to how ‘late a cada instante una nueva música nacida de la jubilosa matriz del viejo tema’ (‘Soledad’, pp. 294–95). What he highlights in such statements is the fact that all jazz improvisations need a reference-point—*lo viejo*—a pre-existing melody, a chordal structure, against which the improvisation can be seen to constitute an improvisation, just as, similarly, each style of jazz or innovative jazz musician is characterized by how it or (s)he differs from pre-existing styles and players.

Moreover, in contrast to Cortázar’s claim that jazz musicians never repeat solos, the latter are, at least to some extent, built upon certain riffs and patterns, and often incorporate riffs—musical quotations—from other performances and other performers. This is made clear within Cortázar’s own texts. Bruno tell us in ‘El perseguidor’, for example, that Johnny ‘se ha divertido en citar muchas veces temas de [Charles] Ives en sus discos’ (‘El perseguidor’, p. 262). Indeed, Charlie Parker frequently quoted from other pieces and musicians, once, for example, meticulously quoting Louis Armstrong’s 1928 introductory cadenza to ‘West End Blues’ in a performance of his song ‘Cheryl’.<sup>35</sup>

In short, the practicalities of jazz as genre and as improvisation are wholly linguistic in nature: the conception, ideation, and expression of something new are always already bound within lexical and grammatical relationships to the conventions and language of jazz, conventions and language of which they thus immediately form a part; they are, that is, always already representation and repetition, both theoretically and in more readily practical terms.

So what is the effect of the revisionary analysis of Cortázar’s writing and comments on jazz offered here? Where does it leave Cortázar’s relationship with and presentation of jazz? Well, for one, it underscores the importance of ‘El perseguidor’ in Cortázar’s ‘jazzistic’ œuvre, not because of the overt modelling of Johnny Carter on Charlie Parker, but because it is Johnny Carter who can be seen to appreciate more than any other of Cortázar’s characters the complexity and impossibility of some of the claims that the author makes for jazz. Far from considering his improvisations to be a success in escaping from language, from the ineluctability of representation, and thus attaining a beyond of the divisional and dialectical reality in which humankind lives, Johnny affirms his *inability* to attain this: referring to Bruno’s biography of him as missing his essence, he tells him that ‘no es culpa tuya no haber podido escribir lo que yo tampoco soy capaz de tocar’ (‘El perseguidor’, p. 266). This is one of the most important lines in Cortázar’s work with regard to jazz. For, despite some of the claims made by the author, and emphasized by critics on his behalf, a closer look at his writing reveals, as is ever the case with Cortázar, that

<sup>35</sup> Carl Woideck, *Charlie Parker: His Music and Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 161–63.



something far more complex and far less clear-cut is at stake. The attainment of a beyond of language and representation suggested as possible in jazz is, perforce, ephemeral, lost as soon as it is found. And Cortázar was well aware of this, as when he describes Louis Armstrong's music as 'esa música que crea y que se deshace en el instante' ('Louis, enormísimo cronopio', pp. 17–20). As soon as it is uttered, as soon as it is made present (or presence), it is representation, it is repetition. This is why it is an endless 'avanzar, buscar' ('El perseguidor', p. 242). Such traits are not a sign of jazz's success, but of its inevitable failure. Yet, to counter the claim of another great musician, in this case failure is not 'no success at all'. For the power of jazz music, like the power of Cortázar's writing on it, does not lie in simplistic claims of success in attaining some sort of a beyond of representation, but in the constant search, the constant challenge to language, to music, *and* to such simplistic claims.

What is more, this revisional understanding of Cortázar's engagement with jazz also enables us to appreciate the full significance within that engagement of Johnny's death in 'El perseguidor', as we return once more to Derrida's analysis of Artaud. At the end of his essay on Artaud's theatre, Derrida describes the act of closure of representation:

Parce qu'elle a toujours déjà commencé, la représentation n'a donc pas de fin. Mais on peut penser la clôture de ce qui n'a pas de fin. La clôture est la limite circulaire à l'intérieur de laquelle la répétition de la différence se répète indéfiniment. [. . .] Penser la clôture de la représentation, c'est donc penser [. . .] pourquoi dans sa clôture il est *fatal* que la représentation continue.<sup>36</sup>

This, I would suggest, provides the key to an understanding of the death of Johnny Carter, the one character in Cortázar's writing on jazz to see the inevitable closure, the inevitable repetition within which the representation of jazz is inscribed. His opposition to the recording of 'Amorous' may have been the desire not to inscribe it into iterability, yet as soon as that solo was played, even if that 'representation' were then closed off in never being repeated aloud, it already contains within it—and is contained within—(its own) representation and repetition, and this is fatal, in the double meaning intended by Derrida, in being an inescapable fate and in constituting a deathly mark which inscribes the music's absence (and the absence of its producer and recipient(s)) within its very presence. Johnny's inevitable death, then, marks 'la "mort" ou la possibilité de la "mort" [. . .] inscrite dans la structure de la marque',<sup>37</sup> and thus represents the most telling comment on the essential problematic by which his jazz is riven.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

NICHOLAS ROBERTS

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, 'Le Théâtre de la cruauté', pp. 367–68.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, p. 375.